

# NEWS

APPALACHIAN CENTER  
BEREA COLLEGE



# LETTER

Loyal Jones – Thomas Parrish, Co-Editors

Vol. 22 No. 1 Winter 1993

## Looking Forward

**April 4-9, 11-16 and 18-23:** The John C. Campbell Folk School doesn't seem to call these sessions spring craft weeks anymore, but these week-long affairs offer the usual instruction in basketry, spinning and dyeing, woodcarving and so on. These dates, by the way, do not represent the only times that instruction is available; for full details, not only for April but for following months, contact the school at Route 1, Box 14A, Brasstown, N.C. 28902; phone 1/800-FOLK SCH.

**April 15-17:** New River Symposium, sponsored by the New River Gorge National River, the West Virginia Division of Culture and History and Wytheville Community College, with discussions of all kinds of subjects having to do with this unique river and its valley—natural history, folklore, archaeology, geography and so forth; Ramada Inn, Wytheville, Va. For more information, contact park headquarters—304/465-0508.

**June 4-6:** Heritage Craft Festival, Renfro Valley, Ky. For details call 800/765-7464.

**June 5:** Batik workshop, Huntington Museum of Art. Write the museum at 2033 McCoy Road, Huntington, W.Va. 25701; phone 304/529-2701.

**June 6-12:** Appalachian Family Folk Week, Hindman Settlement School; traditional music, dance, crafts and storytelling. Write the school at P.O. Box 844, Hindman, Ky. 41822 or phone 606/785-5475.

**June 7-25:** Course in Appalachian History and Literature, Berea College. (See separate story.)

**June 10-13:** Festival of the Bluegrass, Kentucky State Horse Park, Lexington, Ky., with Alison Krauss, J. D. Crowe and other notables. Write the festival at P.O. Box 644, Georgetown, Ky. 40324, or phone 904/364-1683 (after April 20 the contact number changes to 606/846-4995).

**June 14-18:** Creative writing conference, Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, Ky. Brochure and further information from the director, Harry Brown, 10900 Highway 52E, Paint Lick, Ky. 40461.

**June 15-24:** Seminar on Native American Culture, Berea College, sponsored by the college's High School-College Cooperative Learning Program; for high school and college faculty members. Contact Jackie Betts, C.P.O. Box 67, Berea, Ky. 40404; phone 986-9341, ext. 6507.

**July 1-3:** Old Joe Clark Bluegrass Festival, Renfro Valley, Ky. Call 800/765-7464.

**July 9-11:** Appalachian Writers Association conference, to page 2

## Preserving the Family

Social workers in children's services have long bemoaned the inadequacy of the help available for families in acute trouble. Of the two existing alternatives, which one was worse—to move the child away from the family and into the dubious ambience of foster care, or to try once again to improve things at home with services that had already proved inadequate?

Neither answer has really pleased anybody. Facing the problem back in the mid-1970s, Catholic social workers in Tacoma, Wash., managed to devise a new approach that won the support of the National Institute of Mental Health. This program, called Homebuilders, created a sort of intensive-care unit for families with severe social and psychological problems. Instead of taking a child away, staff members would work closely with family members, staying with them for hours at a time, often for periods as long as six weeks. Sometimes the help was as basic as supplying mattresses and sheets and showing a parent how to obtain food stamps. Other help might take any form, from psychotherapy to advice on budgeting.

During its first six years, Homebuilders helped 92 percent of its client families keep their children, and this rate of success has held up through longer periods. Such results have inevitably caused this ICU-for-families approach to spread eastward.

### "Neat . . . it works"

In Kentucky the program, called the Family Preservation Program, has become one of the most prominent and promising features of the state's work with troubled, neglected and abused children. Now mandated by state law, it has achieved such success in the past four years that other states have turned to it as a model. As a state official put it, "The neat thing about this is that it works."

Appalachian counties in Kentucky are now beginning to come in for their share of FPP activity. One regional development council has recently received funding for an FPP whose nature is shown by the fact that an individual worker will maintain a *maximum* caseload of two families at a time and may serve no more than 12 families a year.

Isn't this expensive? Yes, says a program administrator, but it's far cheaper than foster care for the same number of children. Besides, it produces much better results for the families fortunate enough to enjoy its benefits (obviously, neither this nor any other program can fit everybody and to page 2

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solve all problems). And, perhaps not least important, it's gratifying for the social workers themselves, whose most dedicated efforts often seem wasted.

Altogether, Family Preservation Programs may offer a solution to problems common not simply to Kentucky but throughout Appalachia.

## Summer Stars on Course

Though Americans across the country have become acquainted with Appalachian people chiefly through arts, crafts and literature, it remains true that a good many students and teachers within the region rarely take a critical look at their history and literature. For a number of years now (as readers of the APPALACHIAN CENTER NEWSLETTER will be well aware), the Appalachian Center has sought to rectify this situation through an annual (except for 1991) summer course offering high school teachers and others the opportunity to examine regional history and literature with outstanding writers and teachers.

In this year's course, to be held June 7-25, Ronald D Eller of the University of Kentucky will present a comprehensive history of the region with emphasis on the effects of the Industrial Revolution on Appalachia, and he will pay special attention to current political and economic issues.

Novelist Wilma Dykeman will discuss her own work and that of other influential writers who have used the Appalachians as a setting, including Mary N. Murfree, Thomas Wolfe, James Agee, Harriette Simpson Arnow and James Still. Alan DeYoung will lecture on education and culture, and authors George Ella Lyon, Jim Wayne Miller and Gurney Norman will talk about regional writing and read from their works.

The course is designed primarily for teachers who wish to create Appalachian studies courses or units, but other persons will be accepted as space permits. The total cost (including room and board) is \$275 for educators and students, \$450 for others. Three hours' graduate or undergraduate credit is available through the University of Kentucky.

For more information, write to the address on the outside of the NEWSLETTER or phone 606/986-9341, ext. 5140.

## Laugh Time Again

In addition to the summer courses described in the previous story, Berea's Appalachian Center has another kind of treat in store for students of matters Appalachian. During the July 16-17 weekend Billy Edd Wheeler and Loyal Jones will preside over a fourth festival of Appalachian humor. The three previous shows have produced a variety of jokes and anecdotes that are still being passed around in various corners of the region, and the pranksters scheduled to be present this time promise plenty more of the same.

The list of scheduled participants includes Roni Stoneman, Nashville; Jim Comstock, Richwood, W.Va.; Virginia Kilgore, Nashville; Judge Ray Corns, Frankfort, Ky.;

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Radford University. To participate, or to acquire other information, contact Clyde Kessler, P.O. Box 3612, Radford, Va. 24143.

**July 16-17:** Festival of Appalachian Humor, Berea College. (*See separate story.*)

**August 1-7:** Appalachian Writers Workshop, Hindman Settlement School. This year's collection of luminaries includes old hands like James Still and Jim Wayne Miller together with such newer lights as Chris Offutt and Lisa Koger.

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George Daugherty, Elkview, W.Va.; Sam Venable, Knoxville; and Marc and Anita Pruett, Asheville.

On hand to uphold the view that humor isn't necessarily a laughing matter will be Howard Pollio, professor of psychology at the University of Tennessee, and the protean Jim Wayne Miller, professor of German language and literature at Western Kentucky University. Jones describes Pollio's and Miller's contributions as "scholarly presentations," but despite this stigma, we suspect, you will find plenty of chuckles in these talks.

As has become traditional, another important part of the festival will be contests in which members of the audience win cash prizes for the best story, tale, routine, song and any other definable piece of humor.

Wheeler, a singer, songwriter and playwright from Swannanoa, N.C., and Jones, director of the Appalachian Center, have not only co-hosted the three earlier festivals but have also collaborated on books of Appalachian humor.

If you want more information, you may phone Jones at 606/986-9341, ext. 5140, or write him at C.P.O. Box 2336, Berea, Ky. 40404.

## EYE on Publications

*Wildwood Flower*, by Kathryn Stripling Byer (Louisiana State University Press). A native of the southwest Georgia flatlands, Kathryn Byer is poet-in-residence at Western Carolina University. She sums up the difference between the two environments thus: "If the Deep South is a dusty plain haunted by childhood, these mountains are a crazy-quilt of trails haunted by women's voices."

In these poems Byer speaks in the voice of a fictional character named Alma, who lived in the Blue Ridge nearly a century ago. As you might imagine, Alma talks not of ease and luxury but of leanness and physical hardship and of the kind of disappointed love that we know from ballads. She finds lessons in the simplest tasks, like making soup: "Let the men argue what bark/grown thick as an axe handle prophesies./ I have my own thoughts,/these meat scraps and bone chips./ I stir them/ and stir them."

*The Devil's Dream*, by Lee Smith (Putnam). This saga of a mountain family that's musical almost in spite of itself begins in southwest Virginia in the 1830s and ends six generations later in the opulence of Nashville's Opryland Hotel. But so disappointing and stunted have been the lives of most of the family members that the glitter of Nashville can do little for them. In fact, if you know anybody who

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## A Desire to Serve



Berea College Public Relations

**STUDENTS FOR APPALACHIA**, a community-service program at Berea College, features as one of its activities the Adult Ongoing Reading Program, which recruits and trains local volunteers to work one-on-one with adults who are “learning to read or reading to learn.” Such voluntarism, say the program’s sponsors, not only helps others but also transforms those (such as Berea student Lois Murphy in the photo above) who seek to serve. One SFA member says: “My past experience with community service doesn’t even compare to the things that I hope to do now that I know I can make a difference.”

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speaks of wanting to embark on a country-music career, make sure that your friend reads this book before coming to any firm decisions. Perhaps you can help save a life.

*The Devil’s Dream*, Lee Smith’s eighth novel (one of its predecessors, *Fair and Tender Ladies*, won the Berea College W. D. Weatherford Award in 1988), is a serious attempt to paint a realistic and thorough picture, as is evidenced by the list of sources the author consulted. Whether it’s also a *roman a clef* (the Carter family, maybe?) we can’t say, but regardless of that, it’s certainly a cautionary tale, like those old 1930s and ’40s movies that showed the grimness behind the glitter of Hollywood.

*Kentucky Straight*, by Chris Offutt (Vintage Books/Random House). Half a century ago, a good many non-Southern Americans and an even higher proportion of Europeans owed most of their picture of the South to the novels of William Faulkner. It was a strange world Faulkner gave us, one in which the weirdest excess often seemed merely ordinary behavior. How true was Faulkner’s picture? That question has received a wide range of answers, depending on time, place and the point of view of the answerer.

In any case, as Chris Offutt demonstrates in this collection of stories, Southern Gothic lives on, finding itself as much at home in Appalachia as in Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha. As the admiring reviewer in the *Lexington Herald-Leader* put it, “Here are insanity and suicide (‘Sawdust’), accidental mutilation (‘House Raising’), wild animal attacks and mercy killing (‘Old of the Moon’), gunplay (‘Smokehouse’) and child abandonment (‘Blue Lick’).”

Here they are, indeed; in fact, the stories are much stranger and wilder than that brief summary might suggest. Saying, for example, that “Smokehouse” involves gunplay is something like describing Charles Manson as a guy with a few antisocial tendencies. As this same reviewer comments, these stories lack the “nostalgic gloss and self-

protective postures associated with so much of Appalachian writing.”

You certainly won’t find much nostalgia here, but you do find some Melungeons. Melungeons in Eastern Kentucky? Well, why not?

*The Wrecking Yard*, by Pinckney Benedict (Doubleday). To get right to the point, you won’t find much nostalgia in these stories either. Though they’re not all set in Appalachia, they’re all thoroughly nonurban, capturing what the publishers call the “rough-edged contours and cruelty-tinged personalities of rural America.”

Some of the most striking of these contours appear in the story called “Washman,” which the dust jacket describes with a measure of understatement as “a tale of a violent, terrifying hunt for a deformed kidnapper.” It’s all that and more.

On the other hand, the title story turns an auto salvage yard into a low-keyed scene of human insight and perception. An admirer of Benedict’s previous collection (*Town Smokes*) wrote that “these stories do not spare us the violence of love or the love of violence.” You could say that about this new group as well. This admirer also commented that Benedict “depicts a South that is odd and idiosyncratic.” And that’s just where we came in.

*From Roots to Roses: The Autobiography of Tilda Kemplen*, transcribed and edited by Nancy Herzberg (University of Georgia Press). A native of Campbell County in East Tennessee, Tilda (for “Matilda”) Kemplen came from a coal-mining family and married a miner, but, she says, “I’ve never lost sight of any of the beauty I experienced as a child. My love for the beauty of the earth and what it produces—the flowers, the trees, the berries, and other food—gave me a magic carpet to start out on. Recognizing the beauty around me gave me the vision to want to do the things I’ve done.”

What are some of these things? Notably, she founded, almost 20 years ago, an organization called Mountain  
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Communities Child Care and Development Centers, which ever since has conducted education, health, nutrition and other activities. In recognition of her achievements, the American Institute for Public Service presented her with its 1980 Jefferson Award for Outstanding Public Service Benefiting Local Communities.

Her road to such recognition wasn't easy. Forced to quit school after the eighth grade because she had no transportation and the nearest high school was 25 miles from her home (she was so eager to learn that she went through the eighth grade again, just to get another year in), she managed at the age of 32 to enter a special program at Lincoln Memorial University and in 1962 graduated from Cumberland College with a teaching degree.

Then she encountered one of the enduring realities of Appalachian life. Though she wanted to return to her home county to teach, she had to work in Kentucky for six years because the Campbell County school board gave hiring preference to its members' "nieces, nephews, uncles, aunts or cousins." (What remains a mystery is how she got the job across the state line in Bell County, since Eastern Kentucky school-board members have never been short of relatives either.)

Later, finally back in Tennessee, she had to fight being fired by the Campbell County school board, which wanted to give her job to a person who had not attended college at all (or maybe, she tells us charitably, had gone for a year) and ended up being given as a sop a Title I position dealing with handicapped children—an assignment that led to her acquiring a certificate in special education.

Within a few years she had begun to envision and establish the organization that became the centerpiece of her life. "I wanted," she tells us, "to create a situation where a person can become like a flower popping up and creeping

out of the ground to bloom into full beauty."

Mrs. Kemplen's adventures with her local school board will be found particularly striking by Kentucky readers. Among the many changes it introduced, the famous Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 transferred much of the authority of school boards to new kinds of school organizations, and cries of pain and outrage are still arising from wounded members, many of them in mountain counties. In fact, not content with making noise, school-board leaders are trying to get some of the reform provisions repealed. Other states contemplating educational change can take due note.

One additional point: We note with surprise and some regret that this excellent and well-edited book lacks an index. Too bad!

*Taps for Private Tussie*, by Jesse Stuart (Jesse Stuart Foundation, P.O. Box 391, Ashland, Ky. 41114). The industrious folks over at the Jesse Stuart Foundation have produced yet another attractive reprint, this one being Stuart's most popular novel. A 1943 Book-of-the-Month Club selection, *Taps for Private Tussie* sold more than a million copies during the 1940s and 1950s.

This tale of a poor mountain family's response to a \$10,000 insurance bonanza, said one of the BOMC judges, "gives us many a wild fit of uncontrollable laughter; it also pries up the tight horizon set over us by our self-respecting thrift, and lets us have one wild-eyed glimpse of an undreamed-of spaciousness beyond our ken."

One may well doubt whether this judge, Dorothy Canfield—a well-known literary figure of her day—knew anything at all about the kinds of people Stuart wrote about, but beneath her heated prose lies a truth about *Taps*—that it shows us an attitude toward life not confined to Appalachian Southerners but found in all kinds of people the world over.

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